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RUEHBN/AMCONSUL MELBOURNE PRIORITY 6442
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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/19/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [AF](#) [AS](#)
SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN RESPONSE TO DEMARCHE OF RELEASE
STATEMENTS IN SUPPORT OF THE AFGHAN ELECTIONS

REF: STATE 63551

Classified By: POLCOUNS James F. Cole. Reasons: 1.4 (b);

¶1. (C) Poloffs met with Neil Hawkins, Assistant Secretary, Afghanistan and Iraq Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, on June 19 to convey reftel request for a public statement intended to stress impartiality in regards to the Afghan elections.

¶2. (C) Hawkins stated that Australia was not ready to make any similar statements at this time, but noted that Foreign Minister Smith planned to make a statement in Parliament concerning Afghanistan and Pakistan on Monday, June 22 before he leaves for meetings on the margin of the G8 meeting in Trieste. Hawkins said the FM's statement would mention the elections in passing but likely would not fully convey the message we were seeking.

¶3. (C) Hawkins was aware of the problem of widespread perceptions of Western support for Karzai, volunteering that Australian Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Ric Smith planned to discuss ways to counter this perception in Trieste with SRAP Holbrooke and the other Special Envoys. He agreed that most Afghans believe that the U.S. and most other Western states support Karzai despite the absence of endorsements to that effect, adding the Afghan Ambassador to Australia had expressed a similar view during a recent meeting. Hawkins noted current polling in Afghanistan showed public support for Kazai running around 30 percent, compared to support registering in the single digits for other candidates. Nevertheless, he noted, it was important to be careful about giving the impression that it is a forgone conclusion of victory for Karzai.

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